

Lee County District Attorney's Office



2021 Year In Review



Jessica Ventiere
Lee County District Attorney

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Letter From The District Attorney

Throughout my 17 years as a prosecutor, I've discovered that many people don't know who their District Attorney is, much less what the District Attorney does. I'm hoping to change that with our first ever "Year In Review Report."

Last year, was a year of challenges and great uncertainty for the Lee County DA's Office. However, I hope you'll see throughout this report that our commitment to a safer Lee County never waived. In fact, our commitment only grew stronger. Building programs and introducing initiatives that will serve Lee County for years to come.

The population of Lee County has grown by leaps and bounds, which requires our office to grow to meet the needs of our community. This year, we've met those challenges head on by:

- Adding additional prosecutors;
- Adding a third trial litigation assistant;
- Expanding our services to victims to include victims in Juvenile and District Court;
- Devoting a full-time position to recovering money owed to victims as a result of crime;
- Reducing our annual operating expenses by more than \$16,000;

Additionally, we recognize public safety begins with crime prevention. We believe that supporting our local non-profits that directly or indirectly impact crime prevention is energy well spent. With that in mind, we strive to be involved with our community, helping to educate the public about domestic violence, literacy's impact on incarceration rates, addiction, elder abuse, teens and digital citizenship, and so much more.

Our goals for 2022 are just as ambitious, and I look forward to sharing with you again next year. I am honored and grateful to serve as your District Attorney and proudly present our 2021 Year In Review Report.

Mission Statement

The men and women of the Lee County District Attorney's Office provide professional services to ALL the people of Lee County by:

- Vigorously Prosecuting crime
- Delivering justice for all victims
- Supporting Law Enforcement in seeking the truth
- Aggressively working to prevent crime through education and information



Jessica L. Ventiere

WHO WE ARE

The United States Supreme Court said it best in Berger v. United States. The Prosecutor is "the servant of the law, the twofold aim of which is that guilt shall not escape or innocence suffer." Our duty will always be to seek justice for all.

The District Attorney is a locally elected official responsible for representing the people of the State of Alabama in the prosecution of criminal cases and various civil actions. The District Attorney's Office works closely with the Auburn Police Department, the Opelika Police Department, the Lee County Sheriff's Office, and state law enforcement agencies working within Lee County.

All felony charges are handled through the District Attorney's office. This also includes all misdemeanor offenses that occurred during the commission of the felony offense. The District Attorney's Office is also responsible for all misdemeanor and traffic offenses committed in the county. Stand alone misdemeanors and traffic offenses occurring within the city limits of Auburn or Opelika are handled through the city's municipal court.

Curious about the difference between felonies and misdemeanors? See our "Criminal Law 101" diagram below.



Prosecution Team:

Clay Thomas, Chief Assistant District Attorney
Cathey Berardi, Senior Trial Assistant District Attorney
Garrett Saucer, Senior Trial Assistant District Attorney
Margaret Mayfield, Child Support Assistant District Attorney
Madison Grantham, Assistant District Attorney
Kacey Cooper, Assistant District Attorney
Hayden Hillyer, Assistant District Attorney
Luke Farmer, Assistant District Attorney
Marsa' Aston, Assistant District Attorney

Trial Litigation Team:

Melissa Cupit
Alex Wood
Evette Daniels

Investigations:

David Lane, Chief Investigator

Operations Team:

Sarah Herren, Office Manager
Kristen Mayes, General Operations

Pretrial Diversion:

Kayla Hicks, Coordinator

Restitution Recovery:

Ebony Askew

Child Support:

Shannon Franklin, Coordinator
Shirley Frost
Dana Crowe
Lindsay Tamarkin
Briana Martinez

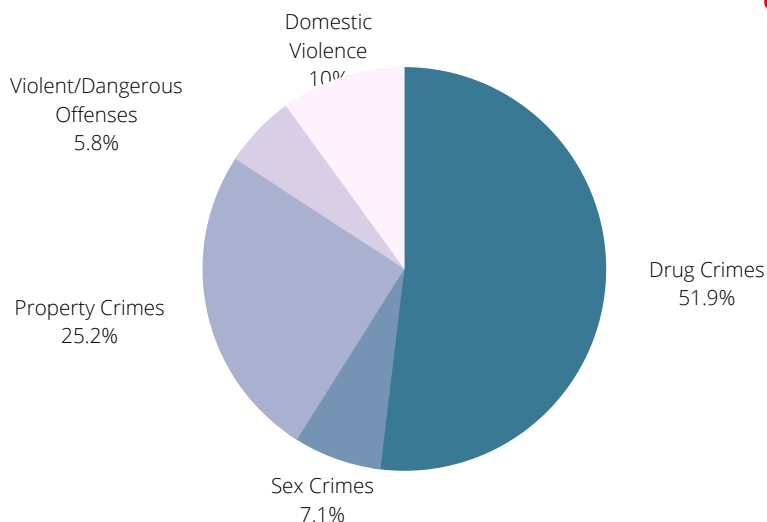
Helping Families Initiative:

LeKeisha Presley, Director
Amanda Amat, Assistant Director

Canine Companions:

Josette
Logan
Chunk, Retired

2021 Crime Trends* By The Numbers



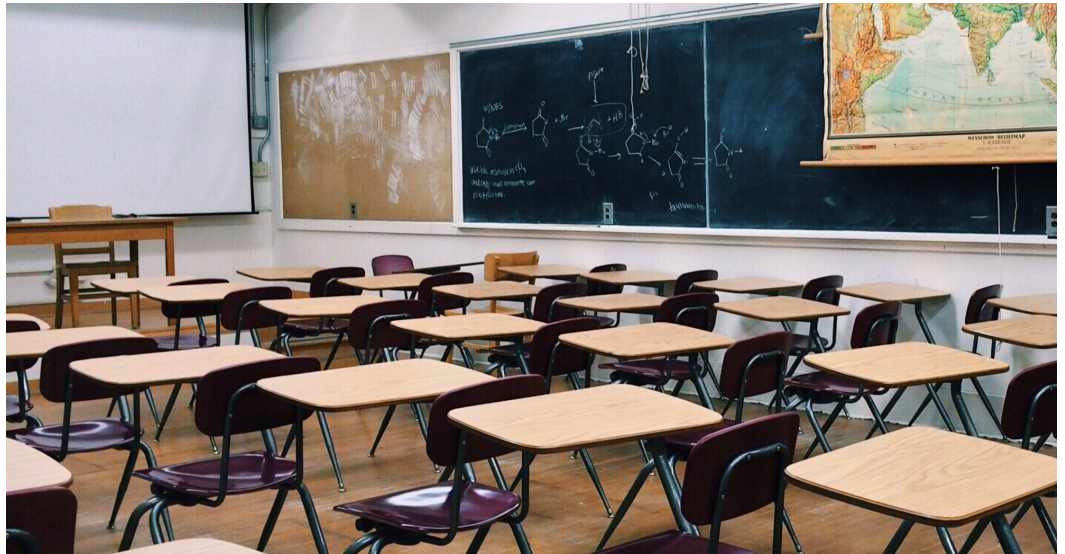
- 3,926 criminal charges filed in 2021
- Recovered narcotics included heroine, cocaine, opiates, methamphetamine, and fentanyl
- 37 weeks of criminal jury terms.
- 26 cases tried to verdict
- An average of 3-4 days to try one case.
- Overwhelming number of cases are resolved through plea agreements.

Crime Trends: Nearly 4,000 criminal charges were filed in Lee County during 2021. The numbers and percentages reflected are based on criminal charges rather than defendants. One defendant may have multiple charges.

*For the purposes of this chart the categories will have the following definitions:

- Domestic Violence: all domestic or family related offenses.
- Drug Crimes: all drug related offenses, including paraphernalia.
- Sex Crimes: all sexually motivated offenses.
- Property Crime: all crimes dealing with the loss of personal or real property.
- Violent/Dangerous Offenses: all homicides and any other crime dangerous to the health of another person such as assault, robbery, and attempted murders.

Helping Families Initiative



HFI Overview

Since 2003, Alabama District Attorneys, through the Helping Families Initiative (HFI), have partnered with their local schools to improve student success, graduation rates, and family stability, all while reducing chronic absenteeism and juvenile arrests. At its heart, HFI is a crime-prevention effort designed to improve family functioning, child well-being, and educational outcomes. This is accomplished through a collaborative approach using resources already at work within our schools, area resource providers, and the support of the District Attorney. It should be noted HFI is not a prosecutorial focused program. HFI seeks to accomplish its goals without making arrests.

After careful thought and consideration, along with the valuable insight of our school Superintendents, I am pleased to announce that the District Attorney's Office is bringing Alabama's Helping Families Initiative to our community!

HFI Strategy

HFI is a partnership between the District Attorney's Office and the surrounding public school systems. HFI works to ensure that schools are safer by offering wrap around services to students & their families in order to identify and remove any barriers to a child's education. HFI assists children and their families by improving a students' academic success, emotional well-being, and family stability which in turn will assist in reducing dropout rates, substance abuse, and juvenile arrests.

HFI Resources

By utilizing our local nonprofits, HFI will offer resources including academic support, mentoring, mental health, parenting support, housing, food insecurity, clothing needs, utilities, domestic violence, life skills, and job training.

Child Support

The Lee County District Attorney's Office, as well as DAs Offices around the state, are under contract with the Alabama Department of Human Resources to provide legal services involving child support.

Those services include establishing paternity and securing and modifying financial and medical support.

This is a difficult and high-volume job, and our Child Support Unit use every tool possible to help Lee County kids.



Lee County Child Support Collections

FY 2020-2021 \$10,903,665.00

Caseload Count: 5605

Awards

During the 2021 Alabama Child Support Association meeting, Lillian Snipes (Lee County DHR) and Shannon Franklin (Lee County District Attorney's Office) were recognized for their hard work in the enforcement and collection of unpaid child support.

Ms. Snipes received the Child Support Advocate of the year award and Ms. Franklin was awarded the District Attorney Administrative Assistant of the Year.

These ladies are part of a team of women who work hard supported Lee County families.



PRE-TRIAL DIVERSION

Our Pre-Trial Diversion (PTD) Program continues to work with nonviolent defendants, who have no prior criminal history, by diverting them from the traditional court system into an individualized and supervised restorative program.

Only those who are eligible and committed to successfully completing the program will be considered. Individuals in the program are required to work, further educational training, perform community service, participate in counseling, report to the PTD Office, pay restitution if applicable, and any other efforts that will further their rehabilitation.

The primary objectives of Pre-Trial Diversion are:

- To prevent future criminal activity among certain offenders by diverting them from traditional processing into community supervision and services.
- To save prosecutorial and judicial resources for concentration on major cases.
- To provide, where appropriate, a vehicle for restitution to communities and victims of crime.
- The period of supervision is not to exceed 18 months, but may be reduced.

PTD 2021

- 160 Individuals were accepted into PTD.
- 96% successful completion rate.
- 7,300 hours of community service were completed.
- Implemented online payment system for restitution payments.

WORTHLESS CHECK UNIT

The Worthless Check Unit (WCU) was formed to collect restitution for victims of worthless checks. The unit assists businesses and individuals who receive insufficient funds and account closed checks.

The Worthless Check Unit is a self-funded service of the District Attorney's Office. There is no charge to victims to use our service. When the bad check writer fails to pay through our office, we assist with the prosecution.

2021 WCU Collections

- \$8,801 was collected and returned to various businesses and victims.

RESTITUTION RECOVERY

Our Restitution Recovery Unit monitors, tracks, and collects delinquent restitution and court costs owed in criminal cases. The Restitution Recovery Program enforces the court's order with several different methods including restitution dockets, contempt hearings, and restitution agreements.

Currently there are over 2,000 individuals that have cases turned over to our Restitution Recovery Program for collection. Individuals may perform community service to satisfy court costs and fees; however, victims must be reimbursed monetarily for their loss.

2021 Restitution Recovery

- Made Restitution Recovery Coordinator a full time position.
- Collected \$380,687.00

VICTIM SERVICES

Every case is important, and our office makes every effort to make contact with crime victims as soon as possible. Letters with general information and our contact information is sent within 30 days of the criminal event.

Additionally, we want to equip victims and survivors with the tools they need to recover by providing a victim's resource guide, answering questions about the criminal justice system, and helping them every step of the way.

In 2021, our Victim Service Officers helped victims and survivors recover \$29, 296.00 in benefits from Alabama Crime Victims' Compensation. These monies help cover medical bills and funeral expenses.

2021 National Crime Victims' Rights Week



National Crime Victims' Rights Week was April 18-24, 2021. It was a great time to raise awareness, honor crime victims, and acknowledge those who advocate on their behalf. Most importantly, this was an opportunity for victims to have their voices heard and to be surrounded by families who are experiencing similar challenges.

On Thursday, April 22nd, we hosted the first ever "Resource Fair and Remembrance Vigil" in front of the Lee County Justice Center. Service providers and community agencies were available to provide information on crime prevention and services. Following the Fair, we held a vigil in honor of those who have lost their lives due to crime.

CANINE COMPANIONS

Josette ("Jo") has been working full time in the criminal justice system since May 10, 2019, when she graduated with her handler as a certified facility dog from Canine Companions. Canine Companions trained Jo in over 40 commands that she uses to serve crime survivors and witnesses as they navigate the judicial process. Prior to being placed as a certified facility dog, Jo was required to pass a public access test with her handler demonstrating that she has the appropriate temperament and demeanor to work in a public setting. Jo is required to recertify with her handler periodically. Jo's primary duty is to reduce the stress of crime survivors and witnesses when they testify in criminal proceedings, thereby enhancing the ability of the court to obtain full and accurate testimony. She does this by lying quietly and unseen at the witness's feet while he or she testifies. Jo also serves survivors and witnesses outside the courtroom by attending meetings with them and waiting with them prior to and after testimony. When not in the courtroom, Jo is able to use her skills to engage with survivors and witnesses by playing games, reading books, and taking walks. When Jo is not working, she loves to chase the ball and have her teeth brushed.



Josette

*"Dogs have a way of finding the people who need them, filling an emptiness we don't even know we have."
-- Thom Jones*



Logan

Logan is a facility dog that works alongside The Helping Families Initiative team at the Lee County District Attorney's Office. Logan is a four year old Labrador Retriever who is always available to lend a paw to the children in our community. Logan was specifically bred and trained by Canine Companions, a certified assistance dog organization that is a member of Assistance Dogs International. Many of the children who are referred to the Helping Families Initiative have commonly experienced trauma, mental health diagnoses, learning disabilities, poverty, abuse, and other problematic behaviors that are preventing them from attending school or behaving in school properly. Logan uses his knowledge of over forty commands to specialize in assisting children by providing reassurance during times of stress or trauma, motivation to reduce negative behaviors, and inspiration to achieve their academic and social emotional goals. As a facility dog Logan provides unconditional love and a feeling of calmness to each child he interacts with. Logan assists in being a key resource to each child as they begin the preventative services through The Helping Families Initiative in hopes of ultimately reducing the number of children at risk of entering the criminal justice system.

2021 DA INITIATIVES

Victims' Assistance Fund



- Established in 2021. The Victims' Assistance Fund helps victim service organizations and individuals with needs that arise as a result of crime. These funds are provided through public donations.

SIDNE Kart



- SIDNE (Simulated Impaired Driving Experience), is a custom-built electric cart that provides a safe simulated driving experience to help educate students on the dangers of impaired and distracted driving. In 2021, SIDNE was introduced to every high school in the county and made appearances at community events.

Second Chance Job Fair



- In August 2021, the DA's office hosted it's first Second Chance Job Fair at Southern Union. The goal is to help match employers and resources with people who have past criminal histories and who are committed to bettering their lives and the lives of their families. 32 local businesses and providers participated. 16% of job seekers became employed through the job fair.

Professional Training



- Throughout 2021, the District Attorney's Office sponsored various law enforcement and professional trainings. Training topics including Human Trafficking, Elder Abuse, Domestic Violence, and DUI.



2021 Notable Trials

FEBRUARY 2021

State of Alabama v. Charles Waltman: Convicted of Attempted Murder, Domestic Violence Strangulation/Suffocation, and Kidnapping.

Waltman was sentenced to 25 years for the Attempted Murder and 20 years on the remaining charges.

State of Alabama v. Vantavious Hughley: Convicted of the 2017 murder of Shaquille Jones. Hughley was sentenced to Life.

MARCH 2021

State of Alabama v. Jarvis Nichols: Convicted of the 2018 murder of Evan Wilson.

State of Alabama v. Farren Edwards: Convicted of Assault of a Police Officer, Two Counts of Throwing Dangerous Missiles/Objects into Occupied Vehicles, Disorderly Conduct, and Resisting Arrest.

State of Alabama v. Rhonda Hill: Convicted of two counts of felony child abuse. Sentenced to two sentences of 10 years split to serve 2 years to run consecutive.

APRIL 2021

State of Alabama v. Marquerious Laquez Canada: Convicted of the 2018 murder of Antonio Drisker. Sentenced to 38 years in prison.

State of Alabama v. Mark Hagler: Convicted of Felony Murder-Child Abuse for the the 2017 killing of 15-month-old Konner Flowers. Sentenced to 55 years in prison.



2021 Notable Trials

MAY 2021

State of Alabama v. De'Andre Neal: Convicted of Robbery, First Degree and Attempted Murder.

State of Alabama v. Linda Powell: Convicted of Assault, Second Degree.

State of Alabama v. Dexter Holloway: Convicted of two counts of Possession of a Controlled Substance, Possession of Drug Paraphernalia, Driving with a revoked drivers' license, and open container.

State of Alabama v. Hubert Sprayberry: Convicted of the murder of James Edmond Clarke. Sentenced to Live Without Parole.

JUNE 2021

State of Alabama v. Brian Askew: Convicted of Human Trafficking, First Degree. Sentenced to Life in prison.

State of Alabama v. James Johnson: Convicted of Sexual Abuse, First Degree. Sentenced to 10 years split two years.

AUGUST 2021

State of Alabama v. John Willie Maddox: Convicted of the murder of Sedrice Lewis and Derris Harris and one count of shooting into an occupied dwelling. Sentenced to 80 years.



2021 Notable Trials

SEPTEMBER 2021

State of Alabama v. Fredricus Johnson: Convicted of Aggravated Child Abuse.

State of Alabama v. Earl Fitzgerald Webb: Convicted of Burglary, First Degree, Assault, Third Degree, and Intimidating a Witness.

OCTOBER 2021

State of Alabama v. Sylvester Jones: Convicted of Domestic Violence by Strangulation/Suffocation. Sentenced to 10 years split to serve two years.

NOVEMBER 2021

State of Alabama v. Jerrell North: Convicted of the murder of Antonio Drisker.

State of Alabama v. Teddy North: Convicted of the murder of Antonio Drisker.

State of Alabama v. Jamarcus Richmond: Convicted of Robbery, First Degree.

State of Alabama v. Victor Thammavong: Convicted of possession of a short-barreled shotgun and possession of methamphetamine.



2021 Criminal Jury Trials

DECEMBER 2021

State of Alabama v. Jesse Simmons: Convicted of Aggravated Child Abuse.

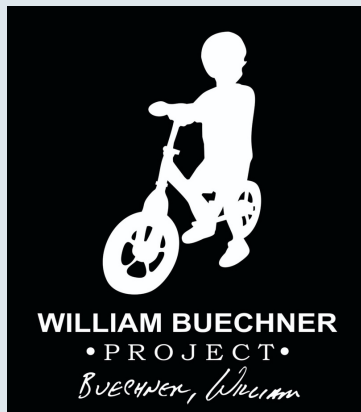
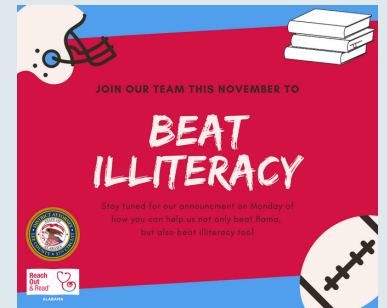
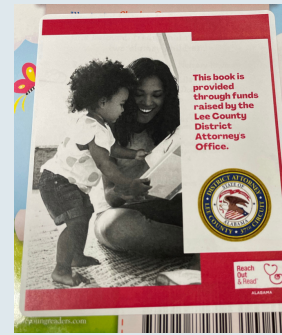
State of Alabama v. Zachary Nichols: Convicted of Aggravated Child Abuse.

GRAND JURY 2021

Grand Juries were convened in April, August, October, and December. The January Grand Jury was cancelled due to COVID. 1,846 cases were presented to those Grand Juries during 2021. That is an average of 461 cases per Grand Jury.

District Attorney employees actively give back to the community by volunteering their personal time to various organizations and programs. In 2021, DA staff volunteered and supported the following organizations and programs: United Way of Lee County • Opelika Chamber 20 Under 40 • Youth Baseball • Youth Soccer • Sunday school leadership • Auburn Ambassadors • Youth mentoring • William Buechner Project • Church Youth Group Leaders • Very Merry Stroll • Opelika Historical Commission • Art Haus.

As an office, we want to highlight and support local nonprofits whose work positively impacts public safety and community wellbeing. These nonprofits address the needs of at-risk youth, food insecurity, education and literacy, child victims, and so much more. Additionally, we want to show our support by participating in community events that promote law enforcement and public safety.



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